Department of Commerce
Safety Report

August 2002

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Introduction

This report provides an update to Department of Commerce (DOC) managers and employees on the progress of Departmental safety initiatives and information regarding important Department-wide safety issues for August 2002. The report also contains the latest available accident data for the Department. Section One of the report, Program Initiatives, provides updates on the safety initiatives outlined in the Safety Program Plan available at http://ohrm.doc.gov/safetyprogram/safety.htm. Section Two, Significant Safety Issues, outlines safety issues and concerns which arose in August 2002. Section Three, Injury Statistics, provides statistics regarding Department injuries, as reported to the Office of Workers' Compensation for July 2002, and an analysis of the data to assist bureaus in focusing their safety efforts. Section Four, Survey Results, provides the August results from the on-line survey available through the intranet Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Program Web Site.

Section One: Program Initiatives

Safety Inspection Training:

Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) regulations for Federal agencies state that "all areas and operations of each workplace, including office operations, shall be inspected at least annually." Workplace safety inspections are the first step in the safety management process, and involve the visual examination of the workplace to identify hazards. Workplace safety inspections can be conducted by a number of people within an organization including management, supervisors, and employee representatives, provided they have proper training or experience to recognize and evaluate the hazards.

To assist bureaus with performing safety inspections of their work areas, the Commerce OSH Program hosted a one-day training program. The training, which was conducted by the Maryland Safety Council, provided guidance on inspection planning and methods, recordkeeping, reporting, and analyzing data.

Safety inspection checklists are helpful for recording hazards identified during inspections and documenting corrective actions. The OSH Program developed Office Safety Inspection Checklists to assist bureaus with conducting and documenting office safety inspections. The checklists are being converted to usable electronic formats and will be available through the OSH Web Site the last week of September.

Safety Managers' Meeting: The Commerce Safety Managers held their monthly meeting on August 8, 2002. The Commerce Safety Director, Tony Pierpoint, presided over the meeting. The key topics included the Department's Safety Council schedule, and Dupont and Maryland Safety Council training. Progress reports were provided from the four special working groups established by the Safety Action Plan for FY 2002. Other topics included the need to update some of the chapters in the Department's Safety and Occupational Health Manual, the FY 2004 budget, and the importance of updating Emergency Evacuation Plans. The minutes of the meeting are available on the OSH Program Web Site.

Safety Program Action Plan: We continue to make progress on the Safety Program Action Plan approved by the Deputy Secretary in February. The plan is posted on the OSH Program Web Site. The four workgroups, which were established to address key components of the proposed Action Plan, continue to work aggressively to identify and implement key initiatives. The goals and activities of each workgroup are listed below. Each group reported its progress at the August Safety Managers meeting.

Inspections and Self-Assessment Workgroup - This workgroup is developing a Department-wide methodology for supervisors to conduct safety self-assessments and safety professionals to complete annual workplace inspections. The workgroup completed the final review process of two checklists for supervisor and safety manager inspections. The checklists will be available on the OSH Web Site in the next few weeks. The workgroup is proceeding with the development of laboratory inspection checklists.

Communications and Training Policy Workgroup - This workgroup is developing safety awareness and training tools for employees and supervisors. The workgroup is incorporating final revisions of the DOC Safety Poster and expects to have it ready for distribution in September 2002. The workgroup is also completing final changes to a web-based ergonomics tutorial and is developing an executive level safety training package.

Reporting Workgroup - This workgroup is addressing the challenging task of developing a web-based system to report accidents. The system will be more comprehensive than the Workers' Compensation system. The workgroup reported that the contractor selection process is nearly complete for the Workers' Compensation Program function. An official announcement is forthcoming.

Health Units Workgroup - This workgroup is assessing the effectiveness of Department Health Units and developing Departmental policy regarding on-site health and occupational safety services. A formal list of recommendations and guidance is being developed, and should be completed in September.

Section Three: Injury Statistics and Analysis

In previous Safety Reports, we provided information on the total number of Departmental injuries for the past five years, and analyzed the types of injuries across the Department to determine the prevalence of such injuries.

The information below is updated using July 2002 statistics. Due to late submissions, processing limitations, and to ensure the accuracy of the information, this section will continue to include information up to the previous month. The data presented in the charts and tables are based upon Departmental Workers' Compensation Program records. At the present time, Workers' Compensation Program records continue to afford the most comprehensive evidence regarding workplace safety.

Total Recordable Cases Incidence Rate: To enable comparison with private industry, we are now using the OSHA "Total Recordable Cases Incidence Rate (TRCIR)" formula as our measure of injuries rather than determining the injury rate per 100 employees. The TRCIR formula divides the number of accidents by the actual hours worked in the organization and multiplies that figure by 200,000, an approximation of potential hours worked for 100 employees. In determining the total hours worked for an organization, we multiplied the number of employees by 1800 hours. A full-time employee can technically work 2087 hours per year if he or she takes no leave. However, given that the average age of our workforce is 46.9 years and the average years of service is 12.8, we imputed the average annual leave accrual rate as seven hours[1]. Based on a seven hour annual leave accrual rate, we then estimated that each employee annually uses approximately 280 hours of combined annual, sick, and administrative leave. We subtracted that total from 2087 and rounded down to 1800. Using this formula, we updated injury rates from FY98 to the present and now depict them as total recordable case incidence rates (TRCIR)[2].

[1]An employee with three years of service earns six hours of annual leave per pay period. An employee with 15 years of service earns eight hours per pay period. All full-time employees earn four hours of sick leave per pay period. There are typically 26 pay periods in a leave year.

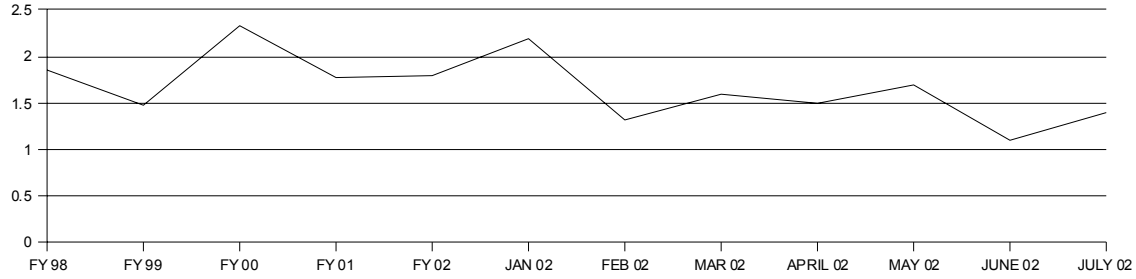
[2] **Please note:** The Total Recordable Cases Incidence Rates (TRCIRs) for FY02 presented in this table have been "annualized" based on October 2001 through June 2002 information. To accomplish this "annualization," we took the injuries for the first ten months of FY02, multiplied these numbers by 1.2, and applied the TRCIR formula. This process enabled us to compute a projected annual TRCIR for each bureau, and for the Department. Our assumption, which may or may not be valid, is that TRCIRs will remain somewhat constant over the course of he year. As we prepare new reports, we will incorporate updated statistical data and modify the projected "annualized" rates accordingly.

Major Findings include:

- **The FY02 TRCIR is comparable to FY01, but down from FY00.** Although the data may not yet be complete, the ***annualized*** FY02 TRCIR is projected at 1.80 based on data from October 2001 through July 2002. The January 2002 TRCIR was 2.18 while the July figure was 1.4. If these figures do not change, the TRCIR will be slightly higher than FY01 (1.78), but lower than FY00 (2.32), as shown in chart one. There were 40 Workers' Compensation claims submitted for injuries or illnesses in July. However, the Workers' Compensation Program continues to receive claims from previous months.

Chart 1

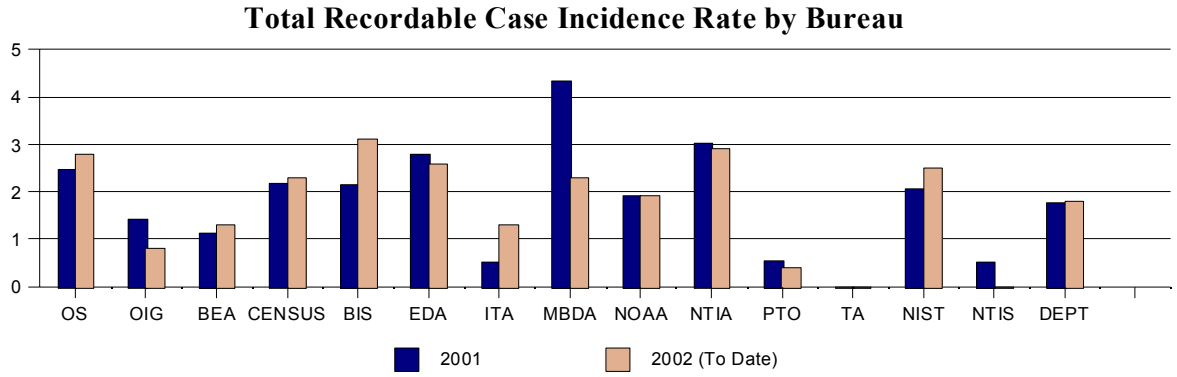
Total Recordable Case Incidence Rate Trend



- **Of the larger bureaus, the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), Office of the Secretary (OS), and the International Trade Administration (ITA) will have higher TRCIRs for FY02 when compared to FY01 (see table 1 and chart 2).** NIST saw a downward trend for TRCIRs from FY98 to FY01. However, their projected rate for FY02 is 21 percent higher than last year. The TRCIR for OS is 14% higher than last year. OS had two injury claims for the month of July. One employee suffered a broken wrist when a computer tower fell on it, while another employee suffered rib contusions during defensive tactics training. The TRCIR for ITA is substantially higher than FY01, but consistent with previous years.

- **Of the smaller bureaus (i.e., bureaus with less than 500 employees), only Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) will have a substantially higher annual TRCIRs for FY02 than FY01, if injury statistics remain constant.** BIS, however, did not have any claims for the month of July.

Chart 2



Types of Injuries: Many of the types of injuries reported can be prevented through improved safety awareness and proper maintenance. A Departmental and bureau focus on eliminating injuries and illnesses is essential. Eliminating injuries and illnesses can be accomplished by evaluating the types of claims submitted and structuring safety awareness training programs to eliminate accidents. Information on types of injuries is provided in charts 3 and 4, and tables 2 and 2A. We did not project findings for the remainder of FY02. Key findings are explained below:

- **"Slips/Falls" continue to be the most prevalent type of injury.** "Slips/falls" accounted for 35 percent of all injuries within the Department from FY00 through December 2001. From October 2001 through July 2002, that percentage remained essentially constant at 36 percent of total injuries. Injuries due to "slips/falls" were 22 percent of total injuries for July 2002. More attention should be given to walking surfaces to reduce injuries from slips and falls. Floors that are wet from mopping should have highly visible warning signs, so employees know to avoid those areas. Trips from cords strung across floors continue to cause injuries. Telephone lines, electrical cords, and other cords should be routed away from walking areas.

- **"Exertion" injuries remain second in frequency for FY02.** "Exertion" injuries are 18 and 13 percent of total injuries for FY02 and the month of July, respectively. To prevent back injuries, employees should use a cart to move objects, and avoid hand carrying them. Proper lifting technique includes keeping the back straight and lifting with the legs. For jobs that require repetitive motion, an ergonomics assessment should be conducted.

- **"Struck and Contact" injuries are also a concern.** These injuries combined for 19 percent of those reported for FY02, and 24 percent for July 2002. A majority of the injuries for FY02 were caused when employees struck open drawers, doors, or low overhead clearances. Those injuries can be avoided by closing drawers that are not being used. Employees should also be aware of their surroundings and use caution. Low overhead clearances should be marked with highly visible paint or tape.

- **"Exposures" are on the decline from early FY02.** A number of illnesses from exposure due to irradiated mail occurred early in the year. However, only one illness associated with exposure was reported for the month of July. The case involved a NIST employee who experienced headaches and nausea from poor indoor air quality. The percentage of total injuries for exposure is 6 percent for FY02 and 3 percent for July 2002. Most exposure illnesses can be prevented through proper ventilation and use of personal protective equipment.

Chart 3

Injury Type As Percentage of Total Injuries for

FY02 Through July 2002

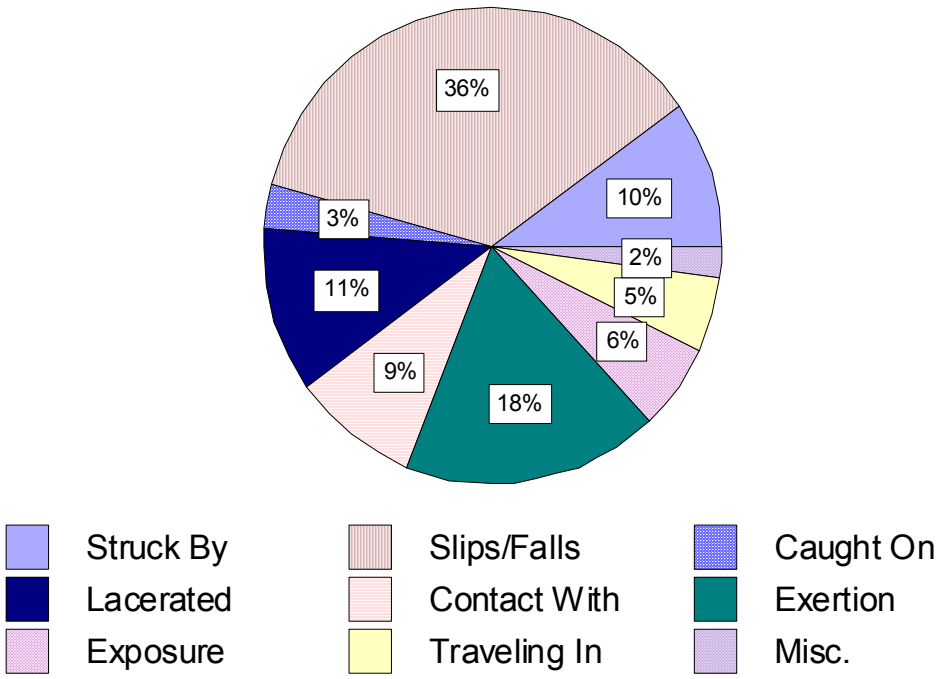


Chart 4

Injury Type As Percentage Of Total Injuries

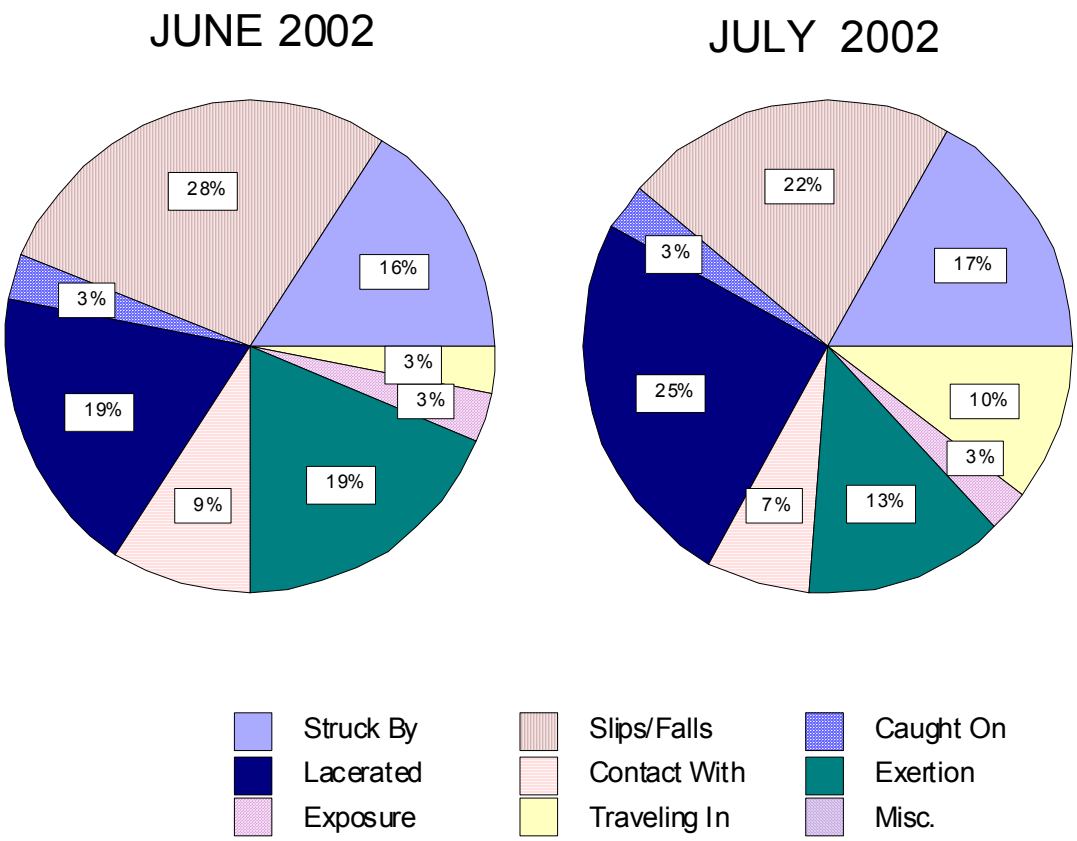


TABLE 1
TOTAL RECORDABLE CASE INCIDENCE RATE

Bureau	FY1998		FY 1999		FY 2000		FY 2001		May 2002		June 2002		July 2002		FY 2002 (To Date)		
															Actual	Annualized	
	No.	Rate	No.	Rate	No.	Rate	No.	Rate	No.	Rate	No.	Rate	No.	Rate	No.	No.	Rate
Office of the Secretary	17	2.6	19	2.2*	34	3.82	22	2.46	0	0	0	0	2	3	19	23	2.8
Office of Inspector General	2	1.22	2	1.32	5	3.72	2	1.42	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0.8
Bureau of Economic Analysis	8	1.74	4	.88	1	.22	5	1.12	0	0	0	0	1	3.1	4	5	1.3
Bureau of the Census	282	1.32	311	1.02	383	2.82	357	2.18	20	2.2	11	1.2	18	2	204	245	2.3
Bureau of Industry and Security	10	3.0	11	3.06	15	4.06	8	2.16	0	0	3	10.3	0	0	9	11	3.1
Economic Development Administration	4	1.7	9	3.66	4	1.68	5	2.8	2	10.2	0	0	0	0	5	6	2.6
International Trade Administration	26	1.32	18	.9	24	1.22	10	.5	0	0	1	0.7	0	0	18	22	1.3
Minority Business Development Agency	1	1.12	1	1.1	3	3.4	4	4.34	2	27.8	0	0	0	0	2	2	2.3
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration	280	2.52	317	2.78	306	2.66	216	1.9	17	1.8	10	1.1	16	1.7	182	218	1.9
National Telecommunications & Information Administration	3	1.2	2	.88	2	.86	7	3.02	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	7	2.9
Patent and Trademark Office	38	.72	27	.46	29	.5	31	.54	2	0.4	2	0.4	0	0	23	28	0.4
Technology Administration	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
National Institute of Standards and Technology	105	3.56	84	2.86	80	2.86	60	2.06	7	2.9	5	2.0	3	1.2	62	74	2.5
National Technical Information Service	2	.64	6	2.6	4	2.14	1	.5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	778	1.86	811	1.48	890	2.32	728	1.78	50	1.7	32	1.1	40	1.4	535	642	1.8

Decennial Census 2000	182	3.42	890	11.32	4798	6.65	32	13.33	N/A	N/A

***Population fluctuations can have a serious positive or negative impact on the Total Recordable Case Incidence Rate.**

Table 2

INJURY TYPES BY BUREAU
AGENCIES WITH MORE THAN 500 EMPLOYEES
(Through July 2002)

BUREAU	NOAA			CENSUS			NIST			PTO			ITA			OS			TOTAL
Fiscal Year	00	01	02	00	01	02	00	01	02	00	01	02	00	01	02	00	01	02	
Struck By/Against An Object	42	24	20	54	56	20	17	16	2	4	6	4	1	1	1	0	5	2	275
Falls/Slips	83	72	53	96	153	89	17	19	23	11	13	7	13	5	7	9	10	0	680
Caught On An Object	6	4	4	8	9	8	1	1	2	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2	0	47
Cuts/Bites	29	20	25	55	36	20	15	12	8	1	2	2	2	1	0	0	0	2	230
Contact With An Object	23	13	16	49	24	12	8	1	5	5	6	6	1	1	2	0	1	1	174
Exertion/ Motion	75	64	49	99	54	31	15	7	13	8	3	1	4	1	2	6	3	1	436
Exposure To Chemicals/ Elements	29	13	7	12	7	5	4	3	3	0	0	1	0	1	6	18	0	12	121
Traveling In Car/Metro/ Taxi	4	4	8	3	10	16	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	49
Miscellaneous*	15	2	0	7	8	3	2	1	5	0	0	2	1	0	0	1	0	1	48
TOTAL**	306	216	182	383	357	204	80	60	62	29	31	23	24	10	18	34	22	19	2060

* Miscellaneous includes injuries not covered in the standard OSHA types of injuries. These include twisting/bending injuries, emotional/psychological stress injuries, injuries which exacerbate a preexisting condition resulting in conditions such as heart attack, seizures, and stoke.

** Decennial Census claims were omitted to provide a clearer picture of injury trends

Table 2A

INJURY TYPES BY BUREAU
AGENCIES WITH LESS THAN 500 EMPLOYEES
(Through July 2002)

Bureau	OIG			ESA/BEA			EDA			TA			NTIS			NTIA			MBDA			BIS			Total
Fiscal Year	**00**	**01**	**02**	**00**	**01**	**02**	**00**	**01**	**02**	**00**	**01**	**02**	**00**	**01**	**02**	**00**	**01**	**02**	**00**	**01**	**02**	**00**	**01**	**02**	
Struck By/Against An Object	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	1	0	0	0	5	0	2	15
Falls/Slips	4	2	0	1	2	2	2	4	5	0	0	0	2	1	0	1	3	3	3	3	2	6	6	0	52
Caught On An Object	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	3
Cuts/Bites	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Contact With An Object	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	3	8
Exertion/ Motion	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	3	2	2	9
Exposure To Chemicals/ Elements	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Traveling In Car/Metro/ Taxi	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Miscellaneous*	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
Total	5	2	1	1	5	4	4	5	5	0	0	0	4	1	0	2	7	6	3	4	2	15	8	9	93

* Miscellaneous includes injuries not covered in the standard OSHA types of injuries. These include twisting/bending injuries, emotional/psychological stress injuries, injuries which exacerbate a preexisting condition resulting in conditions such as heart attack, seizures, and stoke.